HI 451/WS 451: Fashion as History

College of Arts and Sciences, Boston University
226 Bay State Road, Rm. 504
Spring 2017, Thursdays, 12:30-3:15

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-2:30 and Thursdays 3:15-4:15, and by appointment

Course Description:

This upper-level colloquium will treat clothing and other products of material culture as historical documents. A three-piece suit, a Georgian silk dress, a Victorian corset, a ready-to-wear skirt, a t-shirt from the Gap – all offer a useful lens into the culture, politics, and economics of particular times and places. Beginning in the 17th century and ranging across the globe (though concentrating primarily on developments in the West), this seminar will begin to explore what clothing can tell us about trade and commerce, empire, gender, sexuality, class, race, industry, revolution, nation-building, identity politics and globalization. The goal of this seminar, however, is not just to understand fashion as a “window” onto the past. Rather, we will aim simultaneously to see fashion, and material culture more generally, as playing a fundamental role in the shaping of that past.

Requirements for this course will include: weekly critical reflections (1-2 pages), a research proposal (3-5 pages), and a research paper on a topic chosen by the student (12-15 pages). For the final paper, students will visit local fashion museums and collections, including the Shoes: Pleasure and Pain exhibit at the Peabody Essex Museum and the textile department at the Museum of Fine Arts, and choose an item of clothing, footwear or fashion-related accessory on which to focus their research.
Course Texts (required):

- *Nazi ‘Chic’?: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* (Bloomsbury, 2004)
- *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (Claridge, 1994)

In addition to the above texts, several primary and secondary sources will also be posted online and on a class Blackboard web site.

Course Requirements:

- **Attendance.** Course attendance is required. See Class Attendance Policy.
- **Class Participation.** As this is a seminar, it is absolutely essential that you come to class ready to discuss the required readings and other relevant course materials. To help you with this, I will be requiring you to write 1-2 pp. critical reflections on designated week’s reading. *I will read these “reflections” carefully, and they will be graded.* In addition to completing these writing assignments, I encourage you to take an active approach to learning. Make sure to take notes while you prepare for class, and ask yourself questions. Why do you think that a particular reading has been assigned? What are its main ideas and concepts? If you find a reading dull, why? What about it seems strange or difficult to understand? Asking yourself these kinds of questions will help you to participate more effectively in class discussion.
- **Writing Assignments.** In addition to the weekly critical reflections, you will be required to write a research paper, 10 to 12 pages in length. I will circulate more information about the research assignment well in advance of the due date.

Grading Breakdown:

Class participation and attendance (including visits to Boston-area fashion archives): 25%
Weekly Critical Reflections (1-2 pages): 35%
Research Proposal (3-5 pages): 5%
Research Paper (12-15 pages): 35%

Format for Research Paper and Critical Reflections:

All papers (including drafts) must:

- Be typed/word-processed. Handwritten work is not acceptable;
- Be double-spaced in 12 pt. font (Times New Roman preferred but not required);
- Be spell-checked – spelling errors are not acceptable;
- Be grammar-checked to the best of your ability – we will review grammar conventions throughout the semester;
- Include your name, a title, the course title, assignment, page numbers, and the date.
Late Assignments:

Please contact me well in advance of an assignment’s due date if you think that you will have difficulty meeting a particular deadline. All papers submitted late without my permission will automatically be marked down one half grade per day.

Attendance Policy:

Class attendance is required. Please notify me in advance (if possible) if you know that you will need to be absent from class. Under no circumstances will a student who misses more than three classes pass this course. Those who have more than 1 unexcused absence will see this reflected in their class participation grade.

Plagiarism Policy:

This course is designed to encourage critical thinking and writing. In order to become critical thinkers and writers, you must complete all stages of the work yourself: taking the words of others, or presenting the ideas of others as your own not only prohibits you from learning the skills of academic research, it also is a violation of the University’s Code of Academic Integrity. The minimum penalty for such offenses is to fail the assignment; the more common penalty is to fail the course. If you ever have questions about how to cite a source (be it a text, website or person), please contact me. I’m more than happy to help answer your questions – that’s what I’m here for. We will regularly review the University’s plagiarism policy.

Special Circumstances:

If you have a disability registered with Disability Support Services or some other special circumstance that might affect your work this semester, please let me know both verbally and in writing as soon as possible, so I can make appropriate accommodations.

Course Schedule

UNIT ONE: COURSE FOUNDATIONS

January 19: Introductory: What is fashion? What can fashion tell us about the present? About the past?

Reading:

- Diana Crane, Fashion and Its Social Agendas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Chapter 2 [on Blackboard]

UNIT TWO: FASHION AND GLOBALIZATION
January 26: Cotton and Globalization*

Reading:

- Listen to “Planet Money’s T-Shirt Project” podcasts at http://www.npr.org/series/248799434/planet-moneys-t-shirt-project

* Response Paper due

February 2: Fashion and the Making of Empire*

Reading:


* Response Paper due

UNIT THREE: FASHION AND THE POLITICAL

February 9: Fashion and Nation/ Writing the History of Material Culture*

Reading:

- Excerpts from Irene Guenther, Nazi ‘Chic’?: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich (Bloomsbury, 2004), pp TBA
- History and Material Culture: A student’s guide to approaching alternative sources, ed. Karen Harvey (New York: Routledge, 2009), Introduction and Ch. 1, 1-46

* Response Paper due
February 16: Fashion and Revolution/ The Research Paper and Research Process*

Reading:

• Linzy Brekke, “‘To Make a Figure’: Clothing and the Politics of Male Identity in Eighteenth-Century America,” in eds John Styles and Amanda Vickery, Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 225-246 [on Blackboard]

*Response Paper due

February 23: Field Trip to the Textiles Collection at the MFA (contact Lauren Whitley), details TBA

March 2: Field Trip to the Shoes: Pleasure and Pain exhibit at the Peabody Essex Museum, details TBA

March 9: No Class (spring break)

UNIT FOUR: FASHION AND GENDER

March 16: Men in Suits/ Reflections on Field Trips*

Reading:

• Ann Hollander, Sex and Suits (New York: Knopf, 1994)

*Response paper due
March 23: Fashion as Liberation? Women, Clothing and Agency/ Item share*

Reading:

- “Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform” web site, at: http://dressreform.tripod.com/

*Brief description of research item due

UNIT FIVE: FASHION AND IDENTITY POLITICS

March 30: Fashion and the Making of Subcultures*

Reading:

- Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (New York: Routledge, 1979), Intro and Ch. 1, 1-19 [on Blackboard]
- In-class screening of *Paris is Burning* (1990)

*Research proposal due

April 6: Fashion, Race and Social Resistance/Secondary Source share*

Reading:

- In-class screening of *The Zoot Suit Riots* (film)

*Bring in one secondary source to share with the class related to your research project
April 7: Special Event: British Opium and Wool in China Event, 4pm, details TBA

UNIT SIX: PRODUCING FASHION

April 13: Fashion as Industry*

- Nancy Green, Ready-to-Wear, Ready-to-Work (Duke, 1997), Chapters 5 and 6, pp. 138-187 [on Blackboard]
- Selected primary source readings on the Rana Plaza disaster [TBD]
- In-class screening of The True Cost (also available on Netflix)

*Research Paper drafts due to peer groups

UNIT SEVEN: THE RESEARCH PAPER AND COURSE CONCLUSIONS

April 20: No Class: Small Group Writing Workshops – to be scheduled

April 27: Research Paper Presentations/Course Conclusions

**Research Papers due at start of class on April 27**